

moms

In the spirit of the tens of thousands of family members who have lost a loved one to street wars in the Black community plagued with drugs and gun violence, I come before you today in peace.

In support of the thousands of mothers, like myself, who have endured the pain of losing our children to violence on the streets in the District of Columbia, while others look down on us as if street violence only comes to bad people or “those” people deserved it – I ask for your undivided attention.

I am Valencia Mohammed, the mother of six children. I have lost two sons to gun violence in the nation’s capital. In 1999, my 14-year old son, Said Raqib was found murdered in my own home while I attended a weekend sorority conference in Philadelphia. I aged 10 years in a week from crying and begging God to bring him back alive! I have never spoken with the original detective in that case. I was in shock and could not work for the first two years following his death.

The murder tore my family apart. One child became mentally ill, going in and out of mental institutions. Another child, Imtiaz Mohammed, who I believed had a bright future, dropped out of high school with only seven credits left to complete his secondary education. Imtiaz seemed to be on a path of self destruction after the death of his brother. I truly believe Imtiaz found out what exactly happened but he refused to tell me.

On D.C. streets if you know who killed someone - you don’t tell – you take revenge - you wait until the police solve the case or you take the information to your grave! In fact, you don’t even tell your “snitching” mother.

I waited and waited for years to hear some good news about Said’s case. The street rumor was that he was accidentally killed by one of his friends while they were examining a gun they rented with their allowance. I kept that in my heart. My family told the police. But that was the street rumor. We never heard from them again. I always thought I was “due” some official investigation and detailed explanation about Said’s case.

And then it happened again. On October 28, 2004, I received some disturbing news about Imtiaz being shot brutally in front of the home where we first lived in the District. The house is only four blocks from the police precinct. The murder happened around 4 p.m. while I was on my way to computer class. I was hysterical when I heard it because, like Said, I knew there was nothing I could do to bring him back.

I lucked up this time and got two responsible police detectives. However, because they were so efficient at their duties, they also had a heavy caseload. As a reporter many times I would see them in federal court. I kept thinking, how could they be working on my son’s case when they are in court?

I already was determined to become an activist for grieving mothers and an advocate for our loved ones who were killed in the District after Imtiaz was killed.

But what turned me into a 365-day advocate was when I met with the police chief on Imtiaz's birthday. I learned that we had thousands of unsolved homicides on the books since 1969. I also learned that a large majority of those could be solved if we had our own forensics lab.

I told the chief that I would galvanize mothers to help the police department get whatever it needed to make our communities safe. I don't know how many others accepted the charge to pound the streets, grocery stores, churches, schools, metro stations, radio shows, television stations, corridors of D.C. politicians, or the halls of the Congress and Senate – but I knew what my calling was at that point.

"If you could just help me get a forensics lab," said the chief. "I asked, 'Is that all?'" "He said, 'Please help me with that.'" I accepted the challenge. Silently, I swore with the blood of my two sons that I would not stop until this matter received attention on Capitol Hill along with the appropriate funding to erect a fully operational/adequately staffed forensics crime lab.

I took to the streets with a newsletter showing photos of murdered victims. Hundreds of parents called me. We began to organize our efforts on several fronts to stop crime. We began to analyze many of the programs in place that were serving a small segment of our community. We analyzed organizations that received lots of attention but did not produce adequate results.

We also contacted about a dozen jurisdictions with a crime lab, obtained blue prints and information about funding sources. As we near the possibility of the District's own forensics lab, the cost is our concern.

We have been told that the only way Congress would fund the forensics lab is for it to include a bio-terrorist lab component. That's not fair. For decades, we have relied on the FBI to assist us. We have almost 5,000 unsolved murders on the books. Does anyone hear our plea? It's not fair.

We want our own stand alone forensics crime lab! Take the bio-terrorist component where it belongs – with the military or the FBI. Bio-terrorism is a national issue. We need and deserve our own state-of-the-art, full-funded, adequately-staffed, and fully operational forensics lab. Once it has been built, we will need adequate funds to keep it running smoothly.

Cong. Davis, many of the mothers who children were killed in the District come from Fairfax County. They believe that their children's murders are not solved because they reside in your county and not the District. Some of their children came to D.C. for a date, others were just going home from work. And because they may have looked like

someone else, their lives were taken. I want to go back and tell these mothers that Cong. Tom Davis is fighting on our behalf.

I want to give all mothers who have lost children to the streets of D.C. some hope that finally the officials are listening.

Once the Congress decides to provide funding for the lab, we do not want it redirected in any way by the mayor or council of the District. Please hear our plea.

We have planned for dozens of mothers to begin our lobbying efforts after the first of next year. The discussions in this meeting will determine our direction.

For mothers who have lost their children to street violence, the pain is quite different from a mother who has lost her child in a foreign war. We mean no disrespect.

At least the mother of a war casualty gave her child a big kiss goodbye or a hug before they were shipped off to fight for freedom in a foreign country. There might be a big celebration. Then there is the big send off with hundreds of fellow enlistees ready to serve this country.

These parents are fully aware that they have sent their children to “kill or be killed” in a war sanctioned by Americans and the U.S. government.

If their children kill dozens of people in the war, the act is hailed as a victory. If they get killed in the act, they are hailed as heroes!

With street violence, mothers don’t know that the last word spoken, hug or kiss with their children would be the last. There is no big send off party. After they have been killed, no one hails them as a hero, but a victim. Sometimes society and police have preconceived concepts that the child may have caused the demise themselves!

Many mothers don’t fight for their right for closure. They just endure the pain and slowly die inside spiritually until the pain takes over physically and they pass away.

But for those of us who have sworn with the blood of our children, we will continue to fight for our police department to get whatever it needs to keep our communities safe – we will not stop. We have nothing to lose. We have already lost our children.

We leave you in peace until we meet again.

Thank you, Cong. Tom Davis, Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, other congressional leaders and their staff that are here today for allowing mothers of unsolved murdered victims in the District to voice their support for the forensics lab.